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Hard-hitting Congressman Mickey Leland makes his voice heard

By Kenneth P. Robinson

Mickey Leland, once known for raising cane in the '60s, is now raising social awareness in the '80s. But don't let the eloquent, finely dressed exterior fool you. A far cry from the days of tall Afros and African garb, Leland has not forgotten his heritage. He is still lending himself to the causes of those in need, whether they are in need of food, freedom, or just plain inspiration.

In reviewing the congressman's past five terms in office, one is struck by the vast list of accomplishments this native Houstonian has achieved in a relatively short period of time.

Leland was born on November 27, 1944. He graduated from Phillis Wheatley High School in 1963 and from Texas Southern University in 1970 with a bachelor of science degree in pharmacy. He was an instructor of clinical pharmacy at his alma mater from 1970 to 1971.

Leland's political career began in the Texas Legislature where he represented the 88th District from 1973 to 1978. The leadership style he developed there was further honed in the U.S. House of Representatives.

He began his U.S. House term as freshman majority whip in the 69th Congress in 1979-80 and served as majority whip-at-large during the 97th Congress.

His humanitarian concerns led Leland to form the House Select Committee on Hunger. He has served as its chairman since its inception in February of 1984. This committee is charged with conducting a continuing comprehensive study and review of the problems of domestic and international hunger and malnutrition.

In the international sector, investigations by the Select Committee have been influential in strengthening the United States' foreign assistance program designed to aid developing nations. Leland placed emphasis on Africa and in 1984-85, through his leader-

ship, \$800 million was appropriated by Congress for relief for Ethiopia and other drought-stricken nations.

Following that crisis, he obtained funding for reunification of families and care for abandoned children. The committee has since sent delegations to Mozambique, Angola, Sudan, and other countries harshly affected by severe food emergencies to assure that United States aid is prompt and sufficient.

Leland's recently enacted Women In Development bill requires that United States assistance be directed to women in proportion to their participation in any sector. In Africa, where women are responsible for 80 percent of the agricultural effort, this

provision should expand agricultural output. Committee initiatives in primary health care, education, and micro-enterprise credit have channelled increasing amounts of assistance directly to low-income people.

Domestic hunger issues have also been a priority for Leland. Under his leadership, the Select Committee prepared a report documenting the difficulties faced by the poor in obtaining adequate, quality food. As a result, Congress enacted legislation which provides families in 10 states who participate in the Supplemental Food Program with coupons which they can use to purchase produce at farmer's markets. The act serves the dual purpose of assuring

enough sales to farmers while bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income neighborhoods at bargain prices.

The homeless and hungry continue to concern Leland. While visiting emergency food sites throughout the country, Rep. Leland was staggered by the sheer numbers of homeless people, including families, who had no regular source of food or shelter.

After learning of their plight, Leland introduced comprehensive legislation which became the basis for the McKinney Relief for the Homeless Act. Through his efforts, such services as transitional shelter, mental health care, Medicaid, education, and training have been made available to homeless families and individuals.

Leland has always been a leader in the fight for civil rights. He served as chairman of the Democratic National Committee's Black Caucus from 1981 to 1985. He then assumed the chairmanship of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) during 1985 and 1986 because "the people for whom the CBC members serve

as advocates have fallen prey to a willful, deliberate policy designed to terrorize those mired in the most tragic human conditions."

The CBC has nearly doubled its membership since its creation in 1971. Under Leland's chairmanship, the CBC had made huge strides in insuring that the world knew where the U.S. stood on the issue of apartheid.

CBC members sponsored more than 18 bills concerning the U.S. policies towards the government of South Africa. The result was entitled the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1985. In July of 1985, Leland introduced a bill that was incorporated into this act calling on President Reagan to instruct the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations to vote in favor of imposing immediate voluntary sanctions against the government of South Africa.

In an address to CBC members in 1985, Chairman Leland urged:

"Let there never exist a moment when we forget that our brothers and sisters are dying in the streets

of South Africa in the name of freedom. Let us pledge our solidarity, that democracy and justice shall be theirs."

The CBC, while passionate in their efforts to aid foreign countries, has also made significant efforts in defending and securing the civil rights of Americans. Leland has testified at three Senate Judiciary confirmation hearings to voice opposition to several Presidential nominees for federal judgeships.

The CBC is also on record against elevations in the Justice Department of candidates viewed as opponents to civil rights, and U.S. law supporting affirmative action for minorities and women.

Throughout his political career, Congressman Mickey Leland is continually representing the ideals and concerns not only of his constituents but of humanity as a whole. He has never been afraid to speak out when he sees injustice and his concentrated efforts to aid those in need have made him not only a Congressman to respect but a man to admire.



CONGRESSMAN MICKEY LELAND